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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 008224

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [VZ](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: GOC ENDS CHAVEZ/CORDOBA "HUMANITARIAN EXCHANGE"
EFFORTS--GOC TO SEEK "HUMANITARIAN SOLUTION"

REF: BOGOTA 8160

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield - Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) President Alvaro Uribe terminated the mandates of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba in the "humanitarian exchange" process on November 21, after the two intermediaries phoned and spoke with Colombian Army Commander Montoya. Uribe previously told Chavez that he did not have authorization to contact Colombian military personnel. The decision follows a November 20 pronouncement to put a December 31 time limit on the Chavez effort. FM Araujo told the Ambassador that the GOC will continue to search for a "humanitarian solution" to the hostage crisis, and that Peace Commissioner Restrepo would attempt to engage the FARC. The GOC would accept advice from the international community, Araujo said, but no longer seeks new third country intermediaries. The Ambassador told Araujo that we also had concerns over the Chavez effort, and accepted the sovereign GOC decision. The Ambassador urged the GOC to keep hostage family concerns in mind as it moved ahead, and said he would recommend a new USG approach to the French, if the GOC requested it. Uribe's move met with general support in Colombia--and came as Gallup released a new poll showing 78 percent of Colombians approve of his performance as President. End summary.

GOC Reacts to Chavez Call to Colombian Army Chief

¶2. (U) At the November 9 Ibero-American Summit in Chile, President Uribe rebuffed Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez' request to speak directly to Army Commander General Mario Montoya or other Colombian generals. Despite that, on November 21, exchange facilitator Senator Piedad Cordoba placed a call to Montoya, for details on military hostages held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Montoya spoke briefly with Chavez, providing little substantive information. He immediately called President Uribe to report the call.

¶3. (SBU) The GOC issued a short communique on November 21 at

22:00 stating, "the President of the Republic hereby ends the facilitation effort of Senator Piedad Cordoba and the mediation of President Hugo Chavez, who we thank for the assistance they have provided." Uribe consulted with Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo and other advisors before making the decision, which Restrepo told us had been building. It follows Uribe's November 20 decision to put a December 31 time limit on the Chavez effort, and growing GOC frustration over Chavez' decision to carry on negotiations in public (reftel). Restrepo said the GOC will continue to seek a "humanitarian solution" that frees the hostages, but said the GOC could not accept continued FARC delaying tactics or solutions that threatened the GOC "democratic security" policy.

FM Explains Decision and Way Ahead

14. (C) On November 23, Foreign Minister Fernando Araujo called the Ambassador to brief him on the GOC's decision. The FM said the GOC remained committed to intense efforts to produce a humanitarian solution for the FARC hostages. Still, the GOC concluded over the past three weeks that Chavez had not honored the agreement reached in August when Uribe authorized him to engage the FARC. Araujo said Chavez was involved in too much public commentary, despite Uribe's having requested him not to do so, and had publicly misrepresented things that he and Uribe had discussed or agreed. Third, and the final straw, occurred when Chavez reached out directly to Montoya despite Uribe's having specifically asked him not to do so.

15. (C) Araujo said the GOC believed, and would state publicly, that Chavez meant well, but the manner in which he

conducted his efforts was unacceptable. Uribe decided to end the effort before the bilateral relationship suffered in areas beyond the hostages. The GOC hoped this decision would not affect the bilateral relationship with Venezuela, and Araujo said he would take steps to make sure that did not happen.

16. (C) The Ambassador asked Araujo how the GOC would pursue a possible humanitarian solution to the hostages from this moment on. Araujo confirmed that Restrepo would manage the process and attempt to engage the FARC. While the GOC would accept advice and support from the international community, it would not ask any third country to intervene.

17. (C) Araujo then asked how the USG would react to this decision, and whether we would engage the French. The Ambassador responded that this was a sovereign decision for the GOC. We had our own concerns about Chavez' intentions, and the GOC decision was consistent with those concerns. The Ambassador emphasized that it remained important to keep the hostage families in mind as the GOC announced and implemented decisions on the hostages. It was important not to permit Chavez to blame others besides the FARC for this decision. The Ambassador told Araujo that we had communicated our views to the French several times on the hostage issue, and added that he could make a recommendation to Washington to contact the French again if the GOC thought it necessary.

18. (U) Numerous contacts in Congress and civil society--many of whom thought inviting Chavez into the process a bad idea to begin with--said Uribe's decision to cut off the Chavez line was a good one, but a blow to hostage families. Media commentators highlighted whether the "humanitarian solution" phrase indicated a prohibition on negotiation with the FARC or on international involvement. Meanwhile, a newly released Gallup poll for November shows Uribe with a 78 percent approval rating.

Brownfield